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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 000471

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SUBJECT: ISRAELIS PLEASED BY MERKEL'S STAND ON HAMAS AND
IRAN; LESS SO ON HIZBALLAH

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz; Reasons: 1.4 (B)
and (D).

1. (C) Summary: German Chancellor Angela Merkel thoroughly impressed her hosts during her January 29-30 visit with what the Israelis interpreted as strong stances on Hamas and the Iranian nuclear program, according to the German charge' and the Israeli MFA visits officer. Merkel said publicly and to Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that the international community should not deal with -- or provide financial support for -- a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority (PA) unless Hamas recognizes Israel, disarms, and accepts previous PA agreements. Merkel counseled patience on the Iranian nuclear issue, assuring her hosts that the EU-3 are working to obtain Russian and Chinese support for action by the UNSC and insisting that Germany is prepared to move ahead even if these efforts are ultimately unsuccessful. The GOI also requested a tougher EU line against Hizballah, but did not receive a substantive reply. End summary.

Merkel Takes A Strong Stance Against Hamas

2. (C) The MFA said that Olmert and FM Tzipi Livni asked Merkel to help convince other EU members to maintain a ban on contacts with Hamas. In response, the German charge' said, Merkel had called the international community's response to Hamas "a matter of principle," on which "we won't waver." When reporters asked what Germany could do to moderate Hamas, Merkel flipped the question on its head and asked how anyone could seriously expect the GOI to deal with a group pledged to Israel's destruction.

3. (C) In both her official meetings and press events, Merkel insisted that Hamas must recognize Israel, disarm, and accept previous PA agreements before it can be accepted as a partner for dialogue. The MFA said that Merkel's Israeli hosts were universally pleased with what they interpreted as her strong stance on the issue.

4. (C) According to the German Embassy, Merkel told the GOI that the FRG would not provide direct financial assistance to a PA run by Hamas, although humanitarian and development assistance would continue, if necessary through NGOs. Merkel allegedly received conflicting answers from Olmert and Livni when she asked whether Israel would maintain revenue transfers to the PA in the period before the Palestinians form a new government.

5. (C) The German charge' said that Olmert had urged the EU "not to believe" Abbas's claims that he is too weak to act against militants. Olmert insisted that he is prepared to go "a long, long way with the Palestinians" towards peace, but not with a PA run by Hamas. Merkel later told the press that President Abbas had "missed a real chance" and, according to the charge', confided to her staff after returning from Ramallah that she had been "unimpressed" with Abbas.

Israelis Press on Iran and Hizballah

6. (C) The MFA said that Merkel had been "very clear" that Iran had "crossed a red line" and that the Iranian nuclear program poses a threat to all democratic states. According to both the German Embassy and MFA, Merkel agreed that Iran should be reported to the UNSC, although she urged Israel to be patient while the international community works to bring China and Russia on board. Merkel had told Olmert that -- in the end -- Germany would support action by the UNSC even if Moscow and Beijing remain opposed.

7. (C) The German charge' said that Livni pressed the Germans for assistance with other Europeans on cutting contacts with Hizballah. Merkel took the point, but did not provide a substantive response, he said.

8. (C) Both the MFA and German Embassy said that Merkel had made a positive impression on her hosts, especially on Olmert. She spoke clearly and to the point, avoiding theoretical arguments favored by the previous German government. Merkel conducted her meetings in English, but required translation assistance on several occasions when

improvising or using colloquial expressions.

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JONES